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SUBJECT: BANGKOK FY06 REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL HUB WORKPLAN

REF: State 166554

¶1. Summary: In FY06, the Regional Environmental Office (REO) based in Bangkok will continue its broad range of activities in 25 countries in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Three priority topics, however, will likely dominate the attention of this hub - avian influenza, efforts to combat illegal wildlife trafficking, and engagement in ongoing negotiations on the environmental chapter of U.S.-Thailand bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the bilateral Science and Technology Agreement being negotiated separately but in parallel with the FTA. Avian influenza, in particular, is a major concern for this hub - if a human-to-human outbreak of the disease occurs or if a third wave of animal-to-human cases occurs in Southeast Asia, this hub, which works closely on the issue with Bangkok-based personnel of the U.S. Health and Human Services/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (HHS/CDC), and with health personnel at the regional USAID Mission (USAID/RDMA), will have the opportunity to play a key coordinating role between agencies at U.S. Missions in the region. In order to prevent avian influenza from consuming all REO time and resources, REO is discussing with the Embassy front office, the Economic Section, and Human Resources Section the possibility of assigning a Junior Officer to the REO as part of a Consular-Economic Section rotational tour. Priorities, anticipated activities, training, and percentage of time spent on each activity are discussed in detail below. End Summary.

Health

¶2. Avian influenza: REO has met with host government counterparts in Vietnam, Cambodia, and the Philippines on avian influenza, and coordinates closely with the Bangkok-based HHS/CDC, USAID/RDMA health personnel, and U.S. Foreign Agriculture Service on this issue. In October 2005, REO served as the overall control office for Health and Human Services Secretary Leavitt's visit to Thailand. REO also drafted Embassy Bangkok's Avian Influenza Tripwires and Response Plan. In addition, REO will continue and increase its participation in avian influenza public speaking and public outreach events (following on a presentation in Manila and several speaking engagements in Bangkok in 2005). Even if a human-to-human outbreak of the disease occur does not occur, the REO will play a key coordinating role among U.S. agencies and Missions in developing and implementing prevention and outbreak containment plans in the region, including activities to prevent and contain avian influenza funded through the FY05 Tsunami Relief Act emergency supplemental appropriation.

¶3. HIV/AIDS: REO will continue its close working relationship with Bangkok-based HHS/CDC and U.S. Armed Forces Research Institute of Medical Sciences (AFRIMS) in their work on vaccine and treatment regimens. The hub will also continue its efforts to allow for local production of anti-retroviral medications through the Thailand Government Pharmaceutical Office as part of President Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). The REO also coordinates USG activities, including providing input to the Global Fund, and the work of NGOs in the region, especially on cross-border HIV/AIDS prevention efforts.

¶4. Other Infectious Diseases: The REO plans to increase its involvement with HHS/CDC, AFRIMS, USAID/RDMA, bilateral USAID Missions, and NGOs in combating infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria, dengue fever, and other infectious diseases that, although do not capture public attention like avian influenza or HIV/AIDS, are more insidious in the region.

Environment

¶5. Combating Illegal Wildlife Trafficking: The REO organized a regional workshop for ASEAN countries October 17-21 in Thailand that produced a Memorandum of Understanding to create a regional law enforcement network against illegal wildlife trafficking. The MOU will be signed at a ministerial-level meeting, also to be organized by the REO in Thailand in December, just ahead of the ASEAN heads of state summit, which will be held in Kuala Lumpur. The REO will also work closely with the NGO WildAid and USAID/RDMA

in the implementation of a long-term program to follow up on the creation of the wildlife law enforcement network. In addition, the REO plans to work closely with constituent governments to advocate increased penalties and higher prosecutorial priority in bringing wildlife smugglers to justice in the region's criminal court systems. REO also is also maintaining an oversight role with the NGO TRAFFIC in its ongoing program using USG funds to provide capacity building to airport and airline officials in key cities in Asia. Finally, the REO plans to increase its monitoring and reporting of illegal wildlife trafficking in the region.

16. FTA Environmental Chapter: The hub will play an active role, along with USTR and EPA counterparts, in developing an environmental chapter in the bilateral FTA currently being negotiated with Thailand. The goal is to negotiate an environmental chapter that will bind both parties to a commitment not to fail or effectively enforce their environmental laws, through a sustained or recurring course of action or inaction, in a manner affecting trade. In addition, the negotiations will explore several avenues for joint cooperative activities in environmental matters.

17. Illegal Logging: In tandem with efforts to combat illegal wildlife trafficking, the REO will continue to advance President Bush's initiative to address illegal logging. In particular, the hub will work through the International Tropical Timber Organization constituent governments on efforts to better control the legal cutting and export of ramin wood and other timber and non-timber forest products as permitted under CITES. The hub will also meet and work with constituent government agencies and NGOs, in conjunction with bilateral USAID missions, to develop better methods for protecting national forests, combat corruption and promote good governance, and educate and advocate for the rights of forest-dwelling indigenous peoples to harvest forest products in a sustainable manner.

18. Integrated Water Management and Sanitation: The REO will work closely with USAID/RDMA and its contractor in a large-scale regional program to increase the accessibility to clean drinking water and water for sanitation for Asia's burgeoning urban population, especially Asia's poor urban population, through a variety of means, including improved management of water utility companies. The REO will also work to improve shared water resources management activities through coordination with USAID/RDMA and implementing partners such as the Mekong River Commission (MRC). In particular, the REO will maintain its own dialogue with the MRC while exploring possible expanded collaboration between the MRC and USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), and potential collaborative arrangements between the MRC and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

19. Integrated Coastal and Marine Management: The REO was not as active as it would like to be in 2005 in coastal and marine management, and expects to devote more time to the issues that fall under this topic in FY 2006. In particular, the REO plans to become more actively involved in regional efforts to develop sustainable fishing practices, in coral reef conservation and rehabilitation activities, and sea turtle conservation efforts, and in mangrove conservation and reforestation, as well as issues important to sustainable development in coastal areas - hotel and other tourism infrastructure construction, shrimp farming, residential zoning, etc.

110. Sustainable Development through Eco- and Cultural Tourism: The REO plans to work with USAID/RDMA and various local and international NGOs to examine best practices in eco- and cultural tourism. Eco-and cultural tourism, when practiced effectively, can help preserve environmental resources and cultural heritage, especially among indigenous peoples, while at the same time affording local village people the prospect of increasing their income earning potential and diversify their livelihood opportunities away from environmentally exploitative means. When practiced unsuccessfully, eco- and cultural tourism can be ecologically damaging and culturally exploitative in itself.

Science and Technology

111. Science and Technology Agreement: The REO will maintain close coordination with State's OES Bureau and other USG agencies in negotiating an S&T agreement separate but parallel to the environmental chapter of the U.S.-Thai FTA. Preliminary discussions have already been held separately and on the margins of the FTA negotiating sessions.

112. Tsunami Early Warning System: Throughout the first half of 2005, the REO played a leading role in the coordination of USG efforts to assist in the establishment of an Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System (IOTWS). USAID/RDMA has now taken the lead on this issue, but the regional environmental

hub will continue to play an important role in coordinating and monitoring the efforts of NOAA, USGS, the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Trade Development Agency, and USAID/RDMA in the development of an IOTWS.

Cross-cutting Issues

¶13. Close Coordination with USAID/RDMA: USAID/RDMA has recently broadened its regional environmental programs from a focus on brown issues such as urban air and water quality to include blue issues such as coastal and marine resource management, and green issues such as biodiversity and wildlife conservation. USAID/RDMA has included the REO as an integral part of its expanded regional environmental activities - for example, inviting REO to sit on its technical evaluation committee to evaluate and select contractors for its clean drinking water and sanitation program, which will include activities across the region from the Philippines to India. REO will continue its close working relationship with the USAID/RDMA Environmental Office as it expands its regional environmental activities.

¶14. Establishment of a new Environmental Hub in Suva: The Department, recognizing that limited resources and the sheer geographic stretch of its constituent posts has hindered the Bangkok REO's ability to maintain effective involvement with its twelve constituent Pacific Island nation states, is establishing a separate Pacific Environmental Hub based in Suva, Fiji, in the summer of 2006. The Bangkok-based REO will work closely with the incoming hubster and his/her new FSNs to create a first-rate Pacific REO that will effectively address the environmental and health concerns of these island nations that are too often neglected or overlooked.

¶15. Regional ESTH Officer's Conference: REO is planning to hold an ESTH officers' conference for the region after the Chinese New Year in 2006. This will be an opportunity for ESTH officers to network with each other, regionally based government agencies and NGOs, and participants from Washington to strategize on bilateral and regional opportunities to advance U.S. goals on environmental, health and S&T issues.

¶16. Personnel: The geographic reach of the Bangkok regional hub is so vast and the environmental, health, and S&T issues so broad, that the REO is often hard-pressed to cover any of the various issues with the depth necessary for effectiveness. Because of a continuing housing shortage at Embassy Bangkok, the REO is unable to bring over and utilize the services of a Science Fellow. Additional manpower would be helpful, however, especially if avian influenza increasingly diverts human resources away from other issues. To that end, REO is exploring with the Embassy front office, the Economic Section, and Human Resources Section the possibility of assigning a Junior Officer to the REO as part of a Consular-Economic Section rotational tour. (Note: The REO currently consists of the hub officer, an EFM (eligible family member), and an FSN embedded in an Economic Section with five other officers, two other FSNs, and an OMS.)

¶17. Muslim Outreach: Recognizing the importance of the Department's Muslim World outreach strategy, the REO will work closely with ESTH officers in Malaysia and Indonesia to identify aspects of our bilateral S&T and/or environmental activities that can be integrated with the concept of Muslim outreach.

Percentage of Time to be Spent on Each Priority

¶18. Avian influenza is the wildcard here - a human-to-human outbreak or an increase in animal-to-human cases could mean an explosive amount of avian flu-related activities and a corresponding reassignment of workload priorities for U.S. missions' resources in the region, including those of the REO. Assuming that avian influenza remains a threat, but not a pandemic, the REO estimates the following percentages of time to be spent on each priority issue identified above:

Avian influenza: 20 percent

HIV/AIDS: 5 percent

Other Infectious Diseases: 5 percent

Overall Health: 30 percent

Combating Illegal Wildlife Trafficking: 15 percent

FTA Environmental Chapter: 10 percent

Illegal Logging: 5 percent

Integrated Water Management and Sanitation: 5 percent

Coastal and Marine Management: 5 percent

Eco- and Cultural Tourism: 5 percent

Overall Environment: 45 percent

Science and Technology Agreement: 5 percent

Tsunami Early Warning System: 5 percent

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Overall Science & Technology: 10 percent

Coordination with USAID/RDMA: 2 percent

Establishment of a new Environmental Hub in Suva: 5 percent

Regional ESTH Officer's Conference: 4 percent

Personnel: 1 percent

Muslim Outreach: 3 percent

Overall Cross-cutting Issues: 15 percent

REO Travel Plan

¶ 19. All regional travel will include meetings and activities associated with more than one listed priority so, it would be difficult to make a list of planned travel under each priority as requested in reftel. Most regional travel will include meetings and public outreach associated with avian influenza. Most travel will also include activities associated with wildlife trafficking and/or illegal logging. Travel to Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia will include meetings and activities associated with marine and coastal resource management. There will be travel associated with the FTA and S&T Agreement negotiations, but the next formal session will be in Thailand and the location of subsequent sessions have not yet been decided. Travel to Fiji, Samoa, and Papua New Guinea will be to gain a first-hand understanding of the environmental and health issues that will need to be addressed in the creation of the new Suva hub. The following is a tentative schedule of REO travel in the region:

November 2005: Vietnam (to participate in "S&T Days" event and meet with CDC and USAID on avian flu activities)

December 2005: Papua New Guinea (to discuss wildlife, forestry, HIV/AIDS, avian influenza, and other infectious disease issues)

February/March 2006: Indonesia and Malaysia (to discuss avian flu, wildlife, logging, coastal and marine issues)

April 2006: Fiji, Samoa, Tuvalu (to learn Pacific Island environmental and health issues and lay groundwork for new environmental hub)

June 2006: Cambodia, Laos, Burma (to discuss avian flu, wildlife and forestry, HIV/AIDS, and other infectious disease issues)

August 2006: Philippines (to discuss coastal and marine issues primarily)

Note: The above travel plan is skeletal to allow flexibility to attend conferences and other events as yet unscheduled or unplanned.

Anticipated Training

¶ 20. The REO intends to send its FSN to attend the FSI ESTH training for FSNs (PE 221), September 18-29, 2006.

Boyce